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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000417

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE PASS DOE FOR DAS JBRODMAN AND CGAY
TREASURY FOR ASEVERENS AND SRENENDER
COMMERCE FOR KBURRESS
STATE PASS TRANSPORTATION FOR MARAD
STATE PASS USAID FOR GWEYNAND AND SLAWAETZ
STATE FOR DS/IP/AF, AF/EX, DS/IP/OPO, DS/ICI/PII, DS/DSS/ITA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/20/2016

TAGS: [EPET](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [CASC](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: HOSTAGE-TAKING, SITREP # 29

REF: LAGOS 405

Classified By: Acting Political/Economic Chief Shannon Ross
for reasons 1.4 (D/E).

Hostage Welfare Update

[¶1.](#) (C) Speaking behalf of the Oswalt family, Cody Oswalt's uncle Rickey Oswalt delivered a public plea for his release: "These men were taken so that your situation and demands (can) be heard by the world. Now that the world is aware of your situation, we ask that you release Cody, Russell, and John." The Oswalts declined to take questions. Because the appeal was not widely reported in Nigeria, Shell has requested DVD copies be made available for delivery to the hostage-takers.

[¶2.](#) (C) A Shell representative said additional Hudspith family letters are being gathered for delivery to the hostages, and a joint media appeal by families of all three remaining hostages is being considered.

Hostage Negotiations

[¶3.](#) (C) Delta State Secretary to the State Government (SSG) Uduaghan, Commissioner McCauley of the state office for Ethnic Relations and Conflict Resolution, Delta State SSS Director Bayo Babalola, SSS notetaker Abdulah Eneche, HMG and USG representatives, NGO lead Judy Asuni, and Kingsley Otuaro, a third-party intermediary for the hostage-takers, met at the Governor's Lodge yesterday evening. Otuaro reaffirmed the remaining obstacles to the hostages' release are GON commitment to renounce retaliation and GON movement to open a dialogue toward progress in the Delta. GON, USG, and HMG representatives responded with examples of statements by GON officials assuring no retaliation and statements of willingness to participate in Delta discussions from the US Ambassador and British High Commissioner. USG representatives particularly stressed how "now is the time" for a release, as the militants have achieved a level of international visibility, and any additional delays will only damage their cause.

[¶4.](#) (C) A follow-up meeting, suggested by Delta State SSS Director Babalola to include additional hostage-taker intermediaries so others could assist Otuaro with taking the messages back to the hostage-takers' camp, was held Tuesday afternoon. The same cast attended for the GON, USG, HMG, along with Asuni, but the hostage-taker representatives included Dr. Oboko Bello, Kingsley and Daniel Otuaro, Daniel Ekpibede, and someone calling himself John Bull. GON gave a more polished version of Monday evening's presentation, and FEST officer again highlighted the statements from the Ambassador and British High Commissioner committing to involvement in Delta discussions if invited. These statements apparently made a significant impact on Bello, who agreed to convey the information to the hostage-takers.
(Comment: We are cautiously optimistic about the improved prospects for release following the Monday and Tuesday meetings. End comment.)

[¶5.](#) (C) A Shell representative contacted Senator Diffa, who previously provided accurate notification of the release of the six Philippine, Thai, Egyptian, and American hostages a day in advance, to investigate his recent but incorrect report of imminent release over the weekend. Diffa responded that moves had been underway for a weekend release, but concern over GON commitment to no military reprisals ultimately halted the process. Another Shell representative's contact said there was confusion between the hostage-takers and their third party intermediaries over negotiating tactics.

16. (C) HMG representatives said the High Commissioner will reiterate his previous offer to accept a GON request of HMG participation in a committee to study improvement in the Delta, should the offer be extended, and a press release will be issued today or tomorrow.

Energy Update

17. (C) In the wake of the AGIP attacks (reftel), the press now report total of 631,000 bpd of shut-in production.

Military Update

18. (C) There were no significant military developments.

Media Update

19. (SBU) This Day reported the USG plans to increase the naval presence in the Gulf of Guinea to ensure maritime security. In an email exchange reported in the Guardian, a purported MEND spokesman denied responsibility for the recent attack on the AGIP pipeline (reftel), and also denied foreign sponsorship or any desire to see Nigeria fragmented into multiple states.

Consular Update

10. (C) There have been no reports of additional attacks on AmCits. One mission Conoff and one FEST member are in Warri monitoring negotiations and prepared to assist with repatriation. The UK also has a consular officer in Warri to monitor negotiations and assist with repatriation. The head of Shell Security is on standby for repatriation assistance.
HOWE